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THE RIGHT
OF THE
GERMANS OF BOHEMIA
TO DISPOSE OF THEMSELVES

A Speech
delivered by

Dr. Rudolph Lodgman von Auen
Governor of German-Bohemia



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The right of the Germans of Bohemia to dispose of themselves.

This speech was delivered by the Governor of German-Bohemia, Dr. R. Lodgman, in the German-Bohemian National Assembly, held in Vienna, 28. December 1918.

Gentlemen, since the last session, hold in Reichenberg, of the National Assembly a great number of events have happened, which place the Germans of Bohemia in a totally different situation and make it necessary for me, in opening this Assembly to reassume which happened since and to consider the duty which lies before us.

As soon as the government of German-Bohemia had settled in Reichenberg, it appeared that the administration of the province could only be instituted and carried out under great difficulties. Looking back upon a number of weeks, we cannot deny that all we have built up by hard work and untiring energy has fallen a prey to the state of war, in which German-Bohemia finds itself at the present time. The governments most arduous care was to provide the population with food and other necessities of life. We had taken the necessary measures and, confident on the goodwill of the population, we hoped to secure the indispensable victuals. We had provided work on a large scale, being convinced that it was absolutely necessary to remove the danger consisting in the lack of work of large numbers of the population. For this purpose we were about to get hold of all raw material available and to provide the industry with coal and other needs. The political and autonomous administration was attended to, and had to be managed by the provincial government and by the provincial council. All other services, finance, post, railways, insurance for workmen and private

employees, were either installed or made ready and a high court of justice was planned for Reichenberg. All that had to be accomplished while revolution was taking its course, during a period of fermentation, when the former austro-hungarian army had ceased to exist and no new militia had yet taken its place. Though difficulties seemed unsurmountable we would have given the province a satisfactory administration.

But the enemy destroyed our work, by getting hold of the most important points of our traffic and at last by occupying, the whole of the country. When the first German towns were occupied, the pretext was put forward, that this was done to maintain order, but no lawful reasons were given for this proceeding by the Czechoslovak Republic. It is true that at the beginning of the revolution, disorders and pillage had taken place in several towns. But the orderly classes of the population, by holding together, succeeded in mastering the orderless. Assistance offered, at first, in a friendly way, soon became irksome, when it took the form of interference in the self-government of the Germans in Bohemia and when it became clear that the offer of help was only a pretext for the occupation of the whole country by the Czechs. The danger for the safety of the Czech minorities was used as another pretext when German territory was taken under Czech control and it is my duty to declare most solemnly in this place, that there never was any danger for Czech minorities, but that on the contrary agreements had been made between the Czech and German populations for jointly protecting public property, often threatened by disorders. Besides, I have to mention the fact that in some instances pillage took place, because it was known that the Czech troops had seized and carried away property of the former Austrian monarchy which in the course of liquidation should have been used for the benefit of the whole.

The German-Bohemian government thought it their duty to remain in Bohemia as long as possible. They did not try to escape the responsibility when it became clear that the interruption of traffic through the Czechs would render impossible any regular service. The National assembly had appointed them, there were no other lawful representatives of the Germans in Bohemia; so it was clear enough that the government was in duty not to give up their rights even under extremely difficult circumstances.

The behaviour of the czech troops all over the country is contrary not only to international law but also to human feeling. In view of the defenceless condition of the country they interfere with the private property of the inhabitants. They take away victuals and other necessities of life, not excepting in some instances those belonging to the poor. They examine the luggage of travellers, molest and insult private individuals, use brutal force against them and in many cases threaten to kill them. Hostages are taken, public officials cast out of their offices and forced to submit to the oppressors will. German territory is declared Czech property, and all the work done by German labour and intelligence, is claimed in favour of the Czech Republic. Thus they have got hold of the oldest German university which for centuries has afforded cultural benefits to the Czech nation too. The emblems of the Czech Republic are proclaimed to be the only ones in Bohemia; German language, German inscriptions are suppressed and wiped out by a reckless enemy. This is the way in which the Czechs inaugurate the equality of nations, solemnly announced by the steer leaders!

I am speaking in the name of German-Bohemia, but I am also speaking in the name of European morality and humanity and of the feelings of whole world, when I solemnly protest against these shameful deeds. I cannot doubt that future historians will support what I say. Intoxicated by victories they have had no part obtaining, Czech soldiers regard German land as the booty of war.

Under these circumstances it was evident that the Czechs would not rest until they had occupied the provisional seat of the government and suspended the activity of the men, who had been elected to represent the Germans of Bohemia. If this plan had been successful, the Germans of Bohemia would have been deprived of their only lawful representatives, there would have been no one to claim the unalienable rights of the country and to fight for them. This could not be tolerated under any circumstances and when the plans of the Czechoslovak Republic became manifest, the government decided to leave German-Bohemia and represent elsewhere the freedom of German-Bohemia up to the time when again its inhabitants could elect lawful representatives. Far away from their country, unable to provide for its wants and to bear the responsibility of its administration, the government still hope to serve the interests of German-Bohemia by being a visible token of its right of self-disposal.

"The future of German-Bohemia is decided! The Germans in Bohemia cannot do better than offer heart and hand to the Czechoslovak Republic, where in return their cultural, national and economical interests will be safeguarded in the most magnanimous way." This promise is reiterated in most of the speeches of the new dignitaries of the Czechoslovak Republic. What is asked is equivalent to a complete submission. There shall be no negotiations as between peoples with equal rights and liberties, but full submission and recognition of the Czech claims on German territory is presumed by the Czech statesmen. Minister Stribrny is reported to have declared in a meeting of the Products Exchange in Prague on December 18th that the Germans of Bohemia were repeatedly invited by the Czechs to partake in the rebuilding of the Czech Republic, that I especially had been requested to join them in this work on October 28th. I can only say that I was not in Prague on that day and that I never would have been able to accept any similar invitation. I have more than once discussed the political developments before and after the Revolution with my old acquaintances among the Czech leaders, who are at present at the head of affairs, and they, I am certain, will testify the fact that I have always had the courage to stand up for the just national claims of the non-German peoples of Austria, at a time when this opinion was not shared by my own people. This proves my assertion that it is impossible for the Germans of Bohemia to help in the building up of the Czech Republic at the price of full submission to the Czech State, because the balances of power has been so very much changed in favour of the Czechs, that they might at any time freely dispose of the Germans' fate! I never belonged to those politicians, who think that Germans are a godlike nation, destined to rule other nations. The "Chosen People" theory was never my own. In the various nations of the globe I have always seen humanity as a whole, though they may differ in the ways, manners and numbers. I have never been slow in discovering the faults and weaknesses of my own people, have warned them and have most particularly called attention to the danger of exaggerating the opinion about ourselves. I did this at a time when those who criticised the popular aims of German policy, were treated with bitterness and indignation. In the present times of deepest humiliation and dire distress I feel the necessity of standing up for my people and just as I did not assent when it was urged that the German people

were better than all the rest, as their military organisation was about to conquer the world, I will not admit now that my people is inferior to others because it was overpowered by the world in arms. The enemy, in striving to treat the Germans within the formerly Austro-Hungarian monarchy, as an object for politess only pretends to apprehend danger from the special characteristics of the Germans, but in reality follows the dictates of his suddenly awakened imperialism and chauvinism. The offer of the present leaders to the Germans accentuates the superiority of the Czechs, and I should have been compelled to reject it in any case, even if there had been an opportunity to accept it. The Czechs decided our destinies in our absence, and did not even make an attempt to ask the representatives of the Germans to attend their National Assembly. They have issued decrees, they apply by brutal force to German districts; in the same way by taking possession of our public services they dispose over rates and taxes paid by our people. They dissolved our municipal councils and replaced them by organisations, controlled by themselves; they deposed and persecuted our lawfully elected representatives and treated some of them in a degrading manner. German-Bohemia is regarded as a war territory, in which the Czechs do not act as friends as they sometimes assert, but as conquerors and absolute masters. At the same time the Czechs are claiming the right of being represented in the municipal council of Vienna, on the plea of democratic representation! This attitude condemns itself and we may say indeed, it was not war that made men quarrel, for in the trenches many who were strangers in life, became friends unto death. What is now happening breeds unalterable bitterness and everlasting hatred and poisons the future relations between two neighbouring nations. The Czechs' despotic policy may triumph for a time, but in the long run its fruits will not contribute anything to the happiness of Europe.

In a speech delivered on the December 20th last, the Czech prime minister Dr. Kramarz explained that where the foundation of new states is concerned, the will of the resident population of the new democratic states counts for nothing, but solely the will of the victorious nation decides. Whether German-Bohemia is to form a part of the Czecho-slowak Republic or not, depends exclusively upon what the Czech people think, the indivisibility of geographical Bohemia is regarded as a palladium and the Germans must accustom themselves to the idea that it is Czech policy which decides in this

case. There principles fully justify the acts of violence committed in the German districts and deplored by the premier. The Germans in Bohemia are well able to perceive that notwithstanding the war, the old laws concerning the founding of states, where they concern the Czech people, are still valid and that the principles on which they are based are proclaimed by the Czechs, who take advantage the ultimate victory of the allied Entente powers. I often remember interesting conversations with my Czech colleagues of the Austrian Reichsrat on the subject of militarism: Those among us, who did not think that the welfare of the world would be assured by an ironclad fist, but by the victory of human feeling had no doubts whatever that the end of militarism could only be hoped for, if a generous and liberal arrangement of national questions could be brought about by the will of the nations. Many politicians on the Czech side have got a chance just now to show that they are earnestly disposed to promote such an arrangement in Europe. We see on the contrary that among the Czechs, military ideas are ruling, that the same old system of violence, intimidation, oppressing public opinion and political persecution, freely indulged in by the Army Commanders of old Austria, is still in full swing, and that the Czech language even applies the expression „high treason” the to concerns of a country whose frontiers have not yet been drawn and to persons, whose citizenship is still under discussion. To denounce the national endeavours of the Germans as high treason, is nothing less than a relapse to the darkest middle ages and is a proof that in the new Czech state, might goes before right. By a similar system the Germans are pressed by force into Czech military service at a time when a man's own conscience ought to decide to which of the new states he belongs. It is against this policy of violence that we are protesting in front of the whole civilized world, and we hope to explain our situation to the council of nations.

The Czechs assert that German-Bohemian industry cannot live outside the Czech state and that therefore it is anxious to join the Czechs politically and by its own free will. The question, whether German-Bohemia should be absorbed by the Czech state cannot be decided by the interests of one or the other industrial group, because the times are happily over, when the destinies of millions of people were decided according to the exigencies of dividends, and whoever would try to solve the German-Bohemian question

from this point of view, would no doubt find himself opposed by an overwhelming majority. But the representatives of the industry of German-Bohemia have already clearly declared that they believe that a satisfactory settlement of the national question can only be brought about by applying the right of nations to dispose of themselves. The Czechs endeavours to sow discord among the Germans, are therefore useless and of no avail. Nor are we impressed by the enticing descriptions of the future Czech state and the reference to the economical impotence of the former German Empire, since it is not yet certain whether in the general downfall of Europe the Czech state will number among the victorious or the defeated. A sober politician will overmore consider that the value of German national feeling is inereasing proportionally to the heavy sacrifices it has to undergo.

I have not the intention of putting asking my hearers who has to bear the responsibility of the outbreak of this worlds-war. Although on both sides many are intent upon deciding this question the answer is still as uncertain as ever, in as much as single persons are concerned, who could have had the power to bring about a worlds catastrophe of such dimensions as have not been before experienced. To my mind it is of no importance to decide which individuals are guilty of having caused the worlds war, for as great as may have been the power they disposed of still they were but political exponents of economical and social circumstances. The president of the Czecho-slowak Republic, Thomas Garrigue Masaryk, in his latest message undertook to explain the forces which were at work in bringing about the war. He is convinced that it was solely due to the unquenchable thirst of Pangermanism to get hold of Eastern Europe. I cannot help thinking that this explanation is superficial. If there is one factor more guilty than all the others it is in my opinion the industrialson and banking policy of all European countries during the last decades, which created the necessity of seeking foreign markets and conquering them at any cost.

A nation's ambition to expand can afterall be only explained by its social and economical conditions. The European were constrained to do their utmost powers in order to feed the masses of population, whilst the capitalist conjuncture in its chase for high dividends forced an increasing percentage of the population to

serve industrial production. At the same time the necessity of feeding these masses, with agrarian home products was more and more lost sight of. This movement is characterised partly by emigration on a large scale, partly by the desire to expand in all cases where the geographical situation favours such undertakings. For them the word "Imperialism" was invented, and it is applicable equally to Germany building a railway to Bagdad, or to the Czech Republic, attempting to incorporate German Bohemia.

It was the war's final aim to change the fundamental tendency of Europe's economical development. This purpose is most clearly expressed in President Wilson's fourteen points. The utterances on democracy and the right of self-disposal, which must not longer be moved about like chess-figures on the chessboard of the world's history, cannot be otherwise understood than in this way. It shall not in the future be possible that those who are ruling by "Gods Grace" or as Masaryk puts it, that theocracy and autocracy in what form whatever, dominate the world. It would certainly not have been possible for the allied powers of the Entente to rally almost the entire world against the German element of Europe, if they had not applied to the intellectual power of the free will of nations. For there is no doubt that the latter induced even the United States to take an active part in the European struggle.

Masaryk is right when he says that only the side, which had got hold of the intellectual power of the nations, could have been victorious in this tremendous conflict, and not the side which expected ultimate triumph from the mechanical organisation of military forces. But in any case it was not the German nation which was defeated! Guided by blind politicians, deceived by kings, it yet held its own against the strongest armies up to the very last, when it broke down, and it is a tragical fate that the Imperialists of all countries want German democracy to suffer for the sins of Autoeracy. Among these Imperialists we number the President of the Czechoslovak Republic, Thomas Garrigue Masaryk. He was wellknown and I may say respected in Germany for fighting wherever truth was concerned and for firm by opposing the mistakes of his people, when historical truth was falsified or whenever wrong was done. He deserved to be highly esteemed by Czechs and Germans alike. It must have cost him a hard struggle to become the political exponent of a people inebriated by victory, to deny the principles

for which he was exposed to persecution and was forced to become a fugitive and to fight in a foreign land for what he felt to be right. He has far too high minded and dauntless not to understand that what he declares to be the policy of the Czech Republic towards the Germans of Bohemia, is the very reverse of what he fought for during his exile. The bogus of PanGermanism has been cast out, when reigning "by Gods Grace" ceased. What has not been done away with, is the Czech nations greed of power, which causes the Czechs to misuse the principles of self-disposal and democracy and prepare Europe for a fresh war. It is true that Bismarek once said that he, who rules Bohemia is lord of all Europe, but this merely shows the political mentality of that time.

Still I should like to ask: Is the Czech people really desirous to rule over all Europe?

What brings about a contract between the Czech and the German element in Bohemia has nothing whatever to do with Imperialist tendencies; otherwise the same disturbances would not arise in other countries, even in the victorious states. Not only the Germans are disputing to the slav races regions of Europe, but there is enmity for the same reason between Poles and Czechs, Poles and Ukrainianians, Ukrainianians and Roumanians, Magyars and Yugo-Slavs, Czechs and Roumanians, Italians and Yugo-Slavs. It will not be possible to settle these disputes in the way Masaryk proposes for the Czechs, to let each nation fix the limits of its own state and then proceed to voluntary rectifications of the frontiers.

If this war had to be brought to an end, it can only be by the application of a general principle to which all parties concerned can consent; it must be avoided that there should be in future pressed and free nations in Europe. If it will be necessary to ask every single parish, as to which state it chooses to belong to, this must be done. This is the only principle, upon which national feeling in Europe can be raised to the higher type, to a league of European States which I think to be the crowning work of the future.

A union of the states of Europe is the only guarantee of order among the larger and smaller nations; it will be the only way of avoiding chaotic conditions, of bringing about the economical development of this continent, which must no longer be allowed to be used as a toy in the hands of imperialist interests fighting against each other. The president of the Czechoslovak Republic

is right when he says that the Germans in the Austria of former days were the victims of an erroneous Austrian patriotism and of the shortsighted Habsburgs. The fiction that Austria was a German state was the curse of the German Austrians and of the German element in general. But I cannot see how things can improve if Masaryk erects a fictitious Czechoslovak state in which millions of individuals are forced into allegiance against their will in order to found a new Austria in company with the Czechs. Masaryk is sinning against the Germans by building up such a state as this. As the Germans appear in the part of the defeated, the Czechs will not mind entering into companionship with them. But he is also sinning against the principle of democracy and is, perhaps unconsciously, doing the work of reaction since he is depriving the latest German revolution of the fruits of its endeavours. He is sinning against Europe also, which according to his plans will again have to play the rôle of a continent torn to pieces in all its parts.

What grounds does the President of the Czechoslovak Republic put forward to justify his claims upon what is purely German territory? His first argument are the Czech minorities in German settlements. Minorities may be found all the world over, on both sides of the Atlantic. If every nation claimed similar rights where such minorities exist, — which by the way, have joined the majorities of their own free will — the union of nations proposed by President Wilson could never become a fact, but universal anarchy would be the consequence. Masaryk asserts that the territory inhabited by the Germans is the property of the Czech people and by doing so, refuses to acknowledge the revolutionary outcome of our days which he puts aside in favour of historical tradition, although he cannot prove that intellectual work was done by the Czechs in past times. On the contrary, the German districts of Bohemia were not colonised nor even improved by the Czechs, but have for centuries been the property of the Germans. It is true that German districts were subjugated by the Czechs at the time of the Hussites, but this would be basing ones claim upon despotic, not upon lawful right. It is certainly not just to select any particular time of history for fixing the future partition of land in Europe. The fact cannot be denied that these same parts of Bohemia were German settlements before the Hussites, as the German laws of numerous cities, for the most part founded on the law of Magdeburg, prove beyond a doubt.

Another fact worth mentioning is, that a large proportion of the country was never occupied by the Hussites, who moved along the great public roads and did not penetrate to the interior. If these claims were justified, any year in the world's history might be taken at random to legalise the claims that might be raised by any nation whatever.

Masaryk also calls attention to the fact that originally the Germans in Bohemia were colonists and immigrants. Historical research does away with this argument, as with the others. No doubt the Marcomans and Quadiens who came after the aboriginal Celtic inhabitants, must have come from somewhere many centuries ago, just as all the Slav tribes did. Therefore if the Germans are to be called colonists, the Czechs of Bohemia must be called the same and if the history of a thousand years of hard work and strict attendance to duty is not sufficient to give the Germans a right to their homes, then the same must be said of the Czechs and they would have to go back to the aborigines of prehistoric times to ascertain who are the legal proprietors of the land.

No more of this! A modern politician cannot spend his time over antiquated views of this kind. The only palladium, by which the Germans of Bohemia are bound to be guided in upholding their political attitude, is the free, unfettered will of the nation! If the Czech Republic does not succeed in making friends of the Germans, it must renounce for all times rely on them as a firm support of their state! The only safe basis for the foundation of modern states is the free determination of a nation: It will be the task of modern policy to organise and bring this about after the war. The social evolution, which will not doubt be the consequence of the war will then be carried out in a spirit, which will enable all nations concerned, be they great or small, to attain economical success. In his message the President of the Czech-Slovak Republic promises that the German minorities in Bohemia will enjoy full national and civil rights in the new Czech state. In as much as this promise applies to the coherent German settlements he must permit us to say that we do not demand gracious treatment on his part, but the full right of self-disposal. Even the promise of democratic self-government could not induce us to change our minds, because self-government ceases to be what it pretends to be, when it is put into execution in the name and by the order of a state, which the popu-

lation refuses to accept for its own. The Germans will be in no hurry to renounce their right after having experienced the behaviour of the Czech-slowaks towards them in the present crisis.

I cannot refrain from mentioning the German minorities in the Czech state, especially in Prague. The Germans of Prague have played a prominent, fateful part in Austria's German policy. The course of events has made foreigners of them and from a legal point of view they signify nothing at all in German-Bohemia. Still the events, which have happened in Prague during the last months cannot be passed over in silence. Not only has the German language been completely silenced in all public offices, but private rights have been violated, German institutions of a private character have been placed under humiliating surveillance and control. If there is anybody, who after such experience looks forward trustfully to coming events, I cannot but envy him. I thought it my duty to call attention to these painful facts, and I must add that we regard the provincial and governmental institutions founded and provided for by our joint means, as common property, which is subject to liquidation and of which we Germans claim our fair share.

The old powers that were, have been put aside, historical tradition and the connection with the dynasty that was and whose egoistical ambitions all the peoples of Old Austria had to pay for, are done away with; we must do away with every attempt to fall back into the ways of the time before the Revolution, we must above all do away with the mentality of the political leaders of the Czech people, who are proclaiming the advent of a pronounced Czech state with a population admitted to belong to different nations.

Whatever the leading Czech politicians may say on the subject, the future destiny of German-Bohemia is not yet decided! We hear a great deal about the claims and the demands of the Czech people, but we are fully aware that the ultimate fate of a people depends solely upon its own doing. It is for this reason that the latest events have not been able to weaken our will to stand up for German Bohemia's liberty! The land of peace was what we wished to become, the land of war fell to our share the land of freedom is what we are striving for!



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